

## **“She's Karostan..”**

Andrew Gryf Paterson, 20.07.2016

*"Forget it man, she's Karostan. Latvian 'Alien' Passport. It's not going to happen."*

On some rare occasions in lived experience it is possible to shape and witness the folding of realism into science-fiction and back out again into reality. The famous writer didn't recognise it on that occasion, or indeed his own words. Almost like white magic, arguably witchery, but most appropriately "Spook County" was the name of the book he was signing. I did feel sorry that I asked him to write those words out twice. Once to my avatar 'agryfp' and another to 'K@2' (Culture and Information Centre). But it was an International #Locative #Media turning point worth enforcing, and enscribing into materiality regardless of usual protocol.

Words that first crossed across the Atlantic from Liepāja's Karosta, #kultani,[1] to Sweden and then beyond, around the world via linked-in-land-sea fibre optics: Three sentences among many others. We were reporting from RIXC Centre for New Media Culture's workshop at that location between 16-26th July 2003—through the curatorial spokesperson of Canadian Marc Tuters—from the first workshop gathering of artists, hackers, thinkers, software-programmers and curators under the umbrella label of 'Locative media'. We who were exploring new mobile and location-based technologies including the United-States's Military-controlled Global Positioning System. It is easy to forget that only a few years earlier the US Government withdrew their ban of GPS for civilian usage.[2] Symbolically we were positioned at that location thanks to the creative curation and organisation of our Latvian hosts. The workshop took place at a contested site, in a former Imperial Russian -built War Port (Liepāja's Karosta) which, due to the vagrancies of History across what was again Latvian territory, had hosted both Nazi-German and Soviet Red Army occupations. And now it was Western technology-oriented artists' turn to set up camp, to map—maybe twist-and-turn—all the layers together into new patterns.[3] All together as words and bytes of interest, this report spread around the blogospheres in July-August 2003, and inspired in him, namely William Gibson, as he was looking online..[4] He made a quick, characteristically mood-setting quote, about who—I imagine—is smart-surviving-tough, but maybe cute, “She's Karostan..”

These quick-quoted words about her were republished, first within our vested-interest article telling about what happened, and then referenced later in reflective papers about Locative Media as an emerging cultural praxis. Among the flood of media-messages accumulating on data-servers around

energy-sourceful locations, there is an imagination that they were actually t/here with you. Now, in your pocket, in your bag, in your memory, in your soul.. Those words "Forget it man, she's Karostan. Latvian 'Alien' Passport.[5] It's not going to happen." were largely forgotten about. Only in the ether. Except, maybe, in the minds, hearts, and guts of those present then in that first 'Locative Media' Workshop, July 2003. And maybe only fleetingly for those not there, data-mining through the interwebs of our memories.

So, to return to materiality, two copies of the book had enscribed dedications. One stayed in my close possession, and I know exactly it's location in space, sitting comfortably among fiction and poetry in a temporary stack of books, relatively nearby. The other one, addressed to K@2 was sent in the post from Chicago. It is not sure where it went. It never arrived, or at least no one remembers where it went or when it stopped moving. Those were terrible days. But I like the poetic fact that one copy is now un-traceable, a memory un-located and out of time. A piece of physical media missing from it's appropriate site in the world. In truth, it is now non-contemporaneous.. To quote again William Gibson, from his fiction-research-blog (Tuesday, August 05, 2003), it really is "ghost-dialog" written on ghost-media no matter what we do.

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## Notes:

[1] *Kultani* is a Finnish word which means literally in English 'my gold' (*kulta+ni*, with the conjugation the personal possessive addition), and is commonly used as a term of endearment and affection, as in 'my dear'. Paterson has used this phrase as a hashtag since late 2015 to associate value to place-names and also with reference to imaginary, anonymous person(s). It may be seen as (romancing again) locative media. Disclaimer: He doesn't reveal, at least in public, if the term also refers to a specific person or persons whom he knows. Presume it to be a contextual-media artefact.

[2] Global Positioning System, GPS, which is maintained by the United States Department of Defence, was declassified in the year 2000 to allow for civilian usage, and is now common-place in all contemporary mobile devices, such as smartphones. It has been operational as a satellite system since 1994. Russian Federation and China also have their own systems, named GLONASS and BeiDou respectively.

[3] As written in the website of the event, "the international workshop entitled 'Locative media' focusing on GPS, mapping and positioning technologies took place from July 16 - 26, 2003 at the K@2 Culture and Information Centre on an abandoned military installation in Liepaja on the coast of the Baltic Sea. The workshop brought together an international group of artists and researchers interested in notions of mobile geography aiming to explore how wireless networking impacts upon notions of space time and social organization". Accessed online July 2016, <http://locative.x-i.net>. The 'LOCATIVE MEDIA \* CLOSING REPORT [01-08-03]: Mapping the Zone.' written by Marc Tuters was published here: <http://locative.x-i.net/report2.html>

[4] According to Wikipedia, William Ford Gibson (born March 17, 1948) "is an American and Canadian speculative fiction writer and essayist widely credited with pioneering the science fiction subgenre known as cyberpunk. Beginning his writing career in the late 1970s, his early works were bleak, noir, near-future stories that explored the effects of technology, cybernetics, and computer networks on humans—a 'combination of lowlife and high tech'—and helped to create an iconography for the information age before the ubiquity of the Internet in the 1990s. Gibson notably coined the term "cyberspace" in his short story *Burning Chrome* (1982) and later popularized the concept in his acclaimed debut novel, *Neuromancer* (1984). These early works have been credited with 'renovating' science fiction literature after it had fallen largely into insignificance in the 1970s." *Spook County* (2007) is a political thriller set in contemporary North America, it followed on from the author's previous novel, *Pattern Recognition* (2003), and was succeeded in 2010 by *Zero History*. The novel concept was originally proposed with a female networks theorist interested in locative technology although her character and profession changed later in development. The themes explored in the book include the ubiquity of locative technology, the eversion of cyberspace and the political climate of the United States in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. During the promotion and reflection of the book on release Gibson is stated as being inspired by early Locative Media websites and 'locative art'. In a subsequent interview in 2010 with Tom Nissley for Amazon.com, he is quoted as saying "When I started, I thought that the 'locative art' stuff would work the way immersion technology did in my earlier fiction.. Then I started liking that it wasn't going to do that." Reference: Nissley, Tom (2010). "Across the Border to Spook Country: An Interview with William Gibson". Amazon.com. Retrieved January 2, 2010 [No longer online].

[5] 'Alien' here can be stranger, foreigner, but also refers specifically to the form of passport allocated to Latvian non-citizens. It was given to residents of the former Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic within USSR who were resident at the time of its collapse and held no other passport. According to latest statistics, a poll made in January 2016, a little over 250,000 person (i.e. 11.8% of the total population) in Latvia still held an Alien passport more than 20 years later. Reference: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-citizens\\_\(Latvia\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-citizens_(Latvia)).

### **About the author:**

Andrew Gryf Paterson (SCO/FI/LV) was a participant in the first international Locative Media Workshop that took place in Liepājas-Karosta, July 16-26th, 2003, as well as an organisational-conversant before and after the event. The workshop was initiated by RIXC Centre for New Media Culture, in collaboration with K@2 Culture and Information Centre (2000-2008) and freelance curator Marc Tuters (then based in Montreal, now Amsterdam). During the workshop Paterson worked together with programmer Jo Walsh to create a proto-type 'Locative Packet' of media+meta-data. Together with local-resident Vladimir Gekoff (then aged 17 years) and fellow-workshop participant Pete Gomes, we explored what may be said to be early mobile-camera 'Snapchat' over bluethooth network range. In collaboration with then RIXC cultural producer, Signe Pucena, they made an early Locative Media narrative, under the heading 'Mapping and Sewing Together Mythologies', that was eventually exhibited back in Karosta, in September 2004 at K.Māksla? Gallery, as part of the EU Culture 2000 funded 'Trans-Cultural Mapping' programme coordinated by RIXC. More info: <http://locative.x-i.net>

Paterson was one of the workshop participants who returned to Karosta most regularly in the years that followed when K@2 was still active, including September 2003, April-May 2004, Christmas-New Year 2005, as well as visits each June 2005-2008. Later, in the period after, he has visited more than 10 times, including on the 5th November 2015, when he led the first Locative Media Workshop guided-tour around 'memory-sites' of that first workshop in July 2003. Participants were a small group of 5 international media art lecturers students for the occasion of iWeek, Art Research Lab at Liepaja University's international study week. He hopes it is not the last time. His related work on archive.org can be found via: <http://archive.org/details/@agryfp>